2. Existentialism and Nietzschean Philosophy in “Zorba the Greek 📒🎙️

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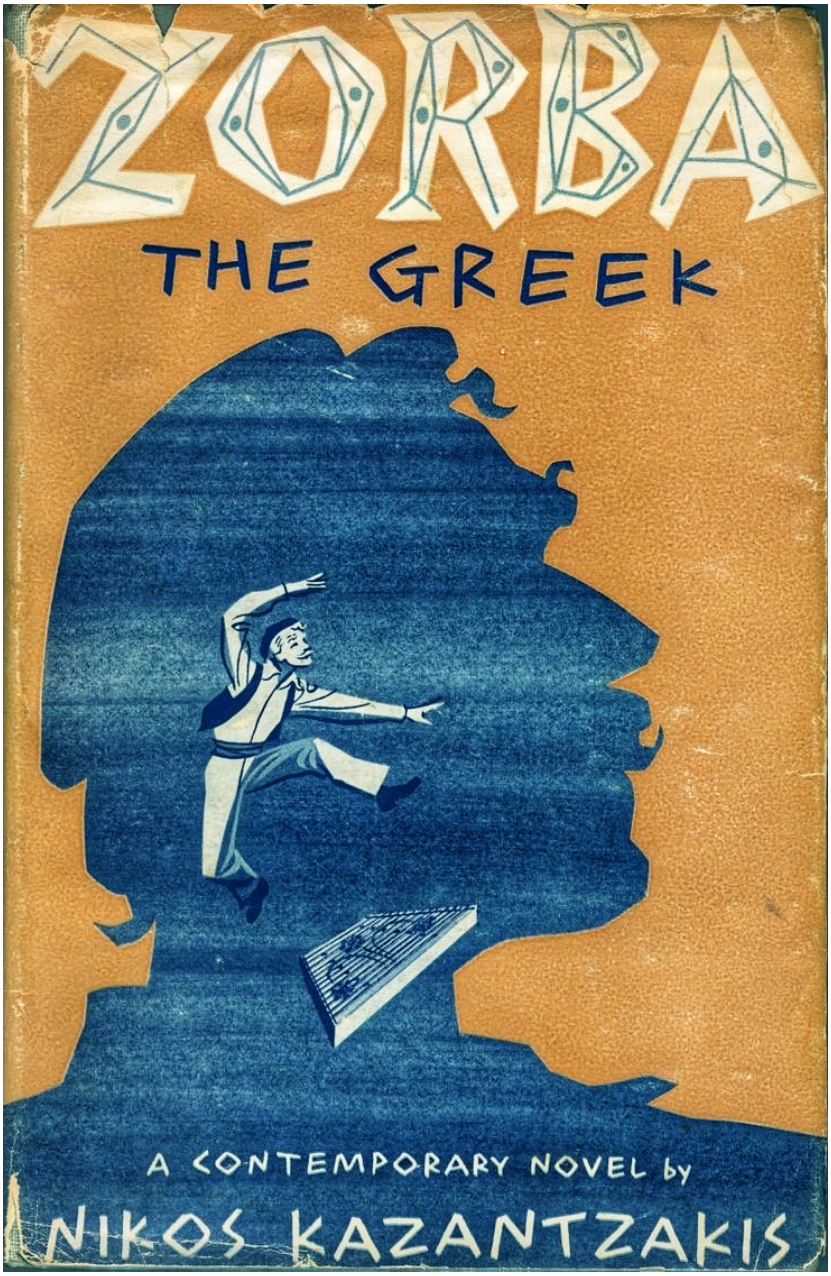

Upon their return to the beach, Madame Hortense confronts Zorba, accusing him of cruelty for leaving her waiting. To make amends, Zorba apologizes, and that night they become engaged. He shares a story from his past, revealing how he once fought in the war and killed a Bulgarian soldier posing as a priest. On Easter, the narrator and Zorba prepare a special meal for Madame Hortense, but a young messenger arrives to say she is ill. Zorba visits her and reports that she has a cold. While Zorba goes to the village to dance, the narrator decides to visit the widow and spend the night with her, feeling rejuvenated afterward as he swims in the ocean.

The next day, a messenger informs the narrator that Bouboulina wishes to see Zorba. Since Zorba is working on the cable system, the narrator visits Bouboulina, who appears very ill. He instructs Mimiko to fetch a doctor immediately. Leaving Bouboulina's house, the narrator discovers a commotion at the church. The villagers, outraged by the widow's actions, decide to kill her. Manolakas brandishes a knife, but Zorba intervenes to protect her. Despite their efforts to escape, the widow is captured by Mavrandoni and executed. The narrator and Zorba return to the beach devastated by the tragic events.

A few days of mourning pass, and Zorba visits Dame Hortense, finding her condition deteriorating. When he returns and the narrator inquires about Bouboulina, Zorba nonchalantly replies that she is dying. He decides to go for a walk, during which he encounters Manolakas, who wants to fight Zorba for dishonoring him at the church. The narrator intervenes and persuades them to reconcile and be friends. The next morning, the narrator and Zorba visit Bouboulina, only to find that she has died. The villagers have looted her home. Zorba takes her parrot, closes her eyes, and departs. Back at the beach, Zorba questions the narrator about God and laments Bouboulina's death. Zaharia arrives, claiming he has burned down the monastery and is now free of his inner demon. Later, Zorba learns that Zaharia has died on the beach, seemingly from a sudden heart failure.

On the eve of May 1st, the new cable railway system is to be unveiled. Villagers and the abbot are present for the event. Just before the first tree is sent down the mountain, a group of monks rushes down, believing the Holy Virgin of Revenge has punished Zaharia for burning the monastery. The first tree catches fire, and this happens twice more. On the fourth attempt, the entire system collapses. After the dramatic failure of the cable railway system, the narrator finally agrees to learn how to dance from Zorba. Despite the setback, he feels happy and content with Zorba, even knowing their financial prospects are bleak. The next morning, filled with joy, he runs up the mountain to reflect. However, he has a premonition that his dear friend Stavridaki has died. In a panic, he races back down the mountain, only to realize his fears are baseless. Exhausted and hungry, he calms himself.

As their venture concludes, Zorba and the narrator prepare to part ways. They are both emotional but too proud to show it. Zorba insists on ending their final night swiftly, as his father taught him. The next morning, the narrator finds Zorba gone and receives a telegram confirming Stavridaki's death. He leaves Crete, and over the years, he gets postcards from Zorba but never sees him again. Eventually, he learns from a German village schoolmaster that Zorba has died. In his final message, Zorba had left his prized santuri to the narrator as a token of their friendship.

Lessons from Zorba the Greek

Existentialism

Zorba the Greek explores existentialism, which asserts that individuals create their own meaning in life. The narrator, a scholarly Buddhist, contrasts sharply with Zorba, who embraces life's pleasures and spontaneity. Initially shocked by Zorba's hedonism, the

narrator gradually recognizes the depth of Zorba's fulfillment and joy. Zorba challenges the narrator's rigid beliefs, advocating for living fully in the moment and finding meaning within oneself rather than through external systems or institutions. The novel highlights that in a world filled with uncertainty and chaos, embracing life's immediate experiences and joys is a valuable way to live.

The Nature of Happiness

A central theme in *Zorba the Greek* is the narrator's struggle to find happiness compared to Zorba's effortless joy. Despite being well-read and spiritual, the narrator is often unhappy. In contrast, Zorba, an uneducated, older man with minimal material possessions, exhibits a deep and infectious joy. This stark contrast highlights how intellectual and material pursuits do not necessarily lead to happiness. Zorba's profound connection to life underscores the idea that true happiness comes from living in the moment and embracing experiences, rather than being determined by possessions or knowledge. This is evident when, despite the failure of their business venture, Zorba and the narrator find true joy in their shared experiences, demonstrating that happiness is a choice and not merely a result of circumstances.

Aging and Death

Zorba the Greek poignantly explores the theme of aging and death, primarily through Madame Hortense, a former beauty now facing the reality of growing old. Her fear of death and nostalgia for her youthful days are evident, particularly as New Year's reminds her of her mortality. On her deathbed, she finds a moment of peace as she confronts the end of her life. The story reflects how characters grapple with the impermanence of life. The narrator, influenced by Buddhist philosophy, seeks detachment to prepare for death, while Zorba, despite his vibrant demeanor, struggles with the loss of his vitality and youth. His humorous attempt to dye his hair black after an affair highlights his own fears about aging. Ultimately, the story reveals that despite varying philosophies and personal struggles, no one truly knows what follows death. This shared uncertainty brings Zorba and the narrator closer, leading them to embrace life fully while they can.

Friendship

In *Zorba the Greek*, the central theme of friendship unfolds through the bond between Zorba and the narrator. Over their time together on Crete, their relationship deepens significantly. The narrator, initially a reserved intellectual, discovers that his detached approach to life hinders genuine human connection. By the end of the story, the friendship between Zorba and the narrator evolves into a brotherly bond, and their shared experiences provide them with lasting joy despite the loss of their business. This friendship contrasts with the narrator's relationship with Stavridaki, which, while loving, lacks true intimacy. Stavridaki's stoic demeanor prevents a deeper connection, and it is only after his death that he expresses regret for not fully opening up. Through these relationships, Kazantzakis underscores that while worldly pleasures may be fleeting, the joy and impact of genuine friendship endure.

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